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Pussycat Press?

By RUTH DEAN
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Is the Washington press corps a pussycat press when it should be made up of tigers?

The contention was made last night during a panel discussion in the National Press Club ballroom, sponsored by the American Newspaper Women's Club to give members of the news media a chance to take a critical look at themselves.

Throwing down the gauntlet was Frances G. Knight, controversial director of the State Department's Passport Office.

Miss Knight compared the competitive investigative reporter she remembered in the 1930s with today's variety which she conceded is "so pushed to cover the waterfront ... he is given no opportunity to pursue an investigation and virtually no time to thoroughly check the facts."

She blamed media bosses for "not doing the investigative, crusading job they should have started years ago" to alert the American public to the growing crime movement in this country and the drug traffic that has followed in its wake.

The same goes for political reporting, she said.

Another panelist, Edwin Diamond of the Post-Newsweek radio and television stations, said he agreed with Miss Knight. "The media, in their faddishness and tendency to run together, tend to be pussycats instead of tigers," he declared.

Panel moderator James McCartney, Washington correspondent for Knight Newspapers, conceded: "If there's a town that needs tigers, it's Washington. But the power of government to control infor-

mation is a tremendous phenomenon here.

Miss Knight disagreed with McCartney's view. "It's up to the reporter. If he's persistent, he can get to his source of information. But so often, he's so pushed he doesn't have the time to do the footwork."

Others on the panel, arranged by Mrs. Sarah McClendon, the club's Professional Committee chairman, were Phil Goulding, former assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, and Mrs. Betty Groebli, WRC-TV news commentator.